

## First in from Cambodia:

# FOUR WHO PRAYED GOT AWAY

A WEEK after Thames TV's horrific film about the betrayal of refugees coming into Thailand from Cambodia, four of those shown in the film arrived by air in Britain. They were Mrs Hong Var, 30, her sister Dyada, 22, and her two children.

Their passage was arranged by Robert Ashe of Christian Outreach who works in the Thai refugee camp at Aranyapathet.

At Goldalming, Surrey, the first Cambodian refugees in Britain found a flat lent, furnished and provisioned by members of three churches.

For Hong Var, a Phnom Penh teacher, who speaks good English, this was the end of four years of fear.

### Expelled

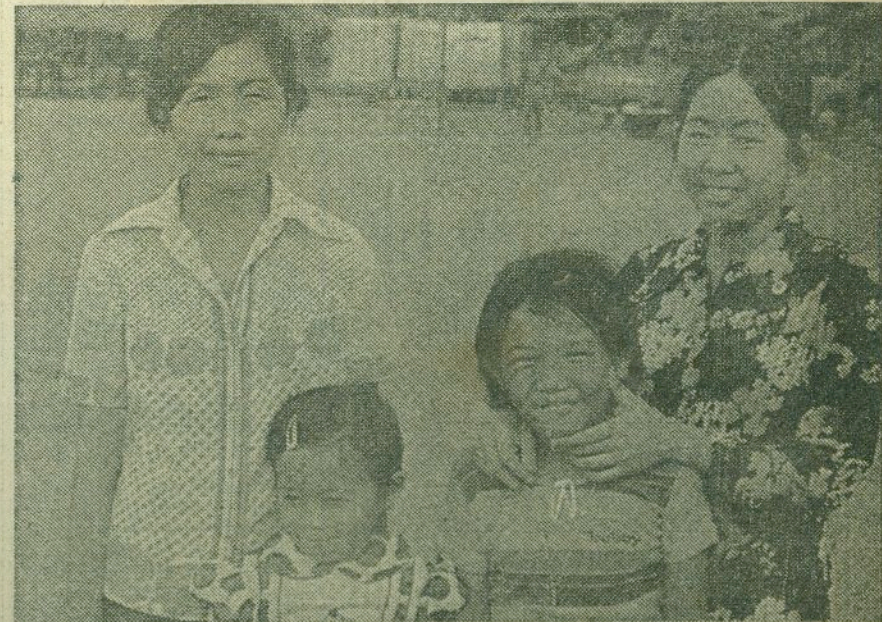
Here she recalls the 17th April, 1975, when the Khmer Rouge took

"Because we expected to return no one took anything and I found myself with my mother, three sisters, two brothers and a brother-in-law being forced to walk into the country.

"On the way we were stopped by the Khmer Rouge who took my Bible and burned it. They burned all books.

"Eventually we were set to work planting rice and digging irrigation channels in the country. We each had a small tin of rice a day and had no money to buy food."

Hong Var's father, a colonel, had decided to stay with his troops



● Hong Var with daughters Panita (6) and Somaly (10) and sister Dyada at the Thai refugee camp at Aranyapathet.

the Khmer Rouge took Phnom Penh.

"They entered the city at 9.30 a.m. and at 12 noon everyone was told to leave for three hours. The reason given was that the army was searching for American soldiers.

stay with his troops. Her husband was an inspector of education who had travelled abroad. Neither have been heard of since.

According to observers it seems that in communist Khmer Rouge eyes both cities

and the West are evil and families are being forced to work in communes of a peasant economy. The fighting with Vietnam forces has now stopped rice planting so the prospect is grim.

"I should explain that the year before I had become a believing Christian after meeting some American friends. My sister and I were members of the Maranatha Protestant church at Phnom Penh.

"It seemed that when we prayed things didn't seem so bad. We knew God was helping us."

One day Hong Var was found to have bought some rice with gold.

"I was arrested and taken before the village chief. I was very frightened because no one was ever let off at these trials and I just prayed to the Lord to save me.

**"When I came before the chief I was let off — to everyone's amazement."**

In May Hong Var and her family were at a village in the Battambang province and planned to escape.

## Forest

"Nearly all the village were going to try and cross the border 14kms away and we set off through the forest. We didn't meet any Khmer Rouge and after 16 hours 209 of us crossed into Thailand at Tathrya."

Hong Var was sick and at a refugee camp Robert Ashe took her to hospital.

**Here it was found she had anthrax — a severe disease contracted through helping cut up a diseased water-buffalo carcass for food.**

She and her family were transferred to the camp at Aranyapathet, her family staying with friends and she in hospital. Later she went to join them and while away from hospital Thai soldiers rounded up 1,700 recently-arrived refugees to push them back into Cambodia.

**"We found we were the only ones who had escaped," says Hong Var.**

"We thank God deeply from our hearts for what he has done for us and we pray too for those in my country who are suffering.